

THE BELLTOWER

Journal of the Arts



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• **About the title:**

Just as the Bell Tower at Tyler Junior College chimes on the quarter hour to mark the passage of time, it reminds students of the harmony which surrounds them in their educational pursuits. Music, dance, theatre, art, athletics, and academics blend to make Tyler Junior College a beacon to the community, the state, and the world at large. As the echoes of the chords filter through the oaks, their vibrations tremble far beyond the confines of the brick archways and winding walks where students gather. Tyler Junior College is a lofty tower of educational opportunity for students who have come from all parts of the world. The Bell Tower Arts Journal proudly hails the accomplishments of its hallowed halls and beckons those who would seek both its traditions and the promise of tomorrow.

~Judith Bateman, 2006

The Bell Tower Arts Journal

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- **Editor**

Linda Gary, Ph. D.

- **Editorial Board**

The editorial board for the journal is comprised of full-time faculty members from the English Department, the Graphic Arts Department, and the Fine Arts Department. The editorial board has the final approval on all selections and publication decisions.

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The selection committee for the The Bell Tower Arts Journal is comprised of student members from the English Department, the Graphic Arts Department, the Art Club, and faculty advisors.

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• Editorial Policy:

The Bell Tower Arts Journal is sponsored by the Psi Gamma Chapter of Sigma Kappa Delta, the National English Honor Society. We accept submissions of poetry, short fiction, non-fiction essays, photography, and fine and graphic art by current Tyler Junior College students. We accept submissions for consideration only during the fall semester each year for possible publication in the subsequent spring semester. The Bell Tower Arts Journal is entirely student generated and seeks to provide a publishing venue for the rich artistic expression of TJC students.

Our goal is to create a publication that is a high quality, content-rich source of literary and artistic expression on a wide range of topics and themes. Therefore, we seek unique, insightful work displaying vivid, lively language and artistic skill.

All submissions must be the original work of the student writer or artist who submits it for consideration or publication. We do not accept previously published or plagiarized work. Every attempt is made by the editor to assure originality. All literary pieces will be submitted to turnitin.com for an originality report. However, it is ultimately the responsibility of each student to submit only his or her own literary and artistic work.

Moreover, while we strongly support intellectual freedom as the right of every individual from all points of view, we do not accept work deemed pornographic, profane, exploitative, or that seeks to cause injury to an individual or group.

Tyler Junior College gives equal consideration to all applicants for admission, employment and participation in its programs and activities without regard to race, creed, color, national origin, gender, age, marital status, disability or veteran status.

• Acknowledgements:

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Deep Thought

Kathleen Page / Tyler / Marker

Living Word

Robert Dappen / Lindale / Pencil Drawing and PhotoShop



The Volunteer Firefighter

Gage Quinn / Coffee City

He is just an ordinary man, struggling to make a living in the harsh society in which he lives. He is a family man, with his wife and child. He gets up every day, 4:00 A.M. sharp, to head to the big city. He works long twelve-hour days. He comes home, spends time with his son, and loves his wife. He hangs out with his buddies, goes to school plays, and tries to be a good Christian man. He also has a second job. For this job, he carries a radio that pulls him into danger. He drives a truck with hundreds of gallons of water. He wears a thick, heavy coat and dirty pants. He wears a helmet that could save his life. He commits to hours of training and school. He must leave his family for one he doesn't even know. For this job, he receives no pay. He is a volunteer firefighter.

It's three o'clock in the morning. After a long day's work, the volunteer firefighter has finally gotten his aching bones to rest. Suddenly, his radio declares in loud tones, signaling danger, "Attention, Rockford City firefighters!" A voice erupts, "We have a report of a fully involved structure fire, possible victims still inside, need you en route." She gives the address of the family in need as he struggles to get dressed, still half asleep.

"Rockford City unit forty-two receive page, en route to station," he says. He

kisses his wife on the forehead and darts out the front door. As he hops into his old, beat-up truck, he notices nobody else has answered this call. He hopes somebody will wake up and join him, but his hope is frail. Still tired from a previous house fire, two car accidents, and the medical emergency earlier in the day, the rest of his firefighters have been captured by a deep sleep and fail to hear the radio. The volunteer firefighter pulls into the station and grabs the engine.

"Robertson County, this is Rockford City Engine 10; show me en route with one." He is starting to succumb to fear. He is by himself, outnumbered by the fire. He requests another volunteer fire department be sent out to help, but it will take ten minutes for them to arrive. The fire is engulfing survival. Driving the red truck down the dark county roads, he prays to God, hoping he will live through this. He knows he must enter the house to rescue the family. It will be his first time inside a burning building, but he feels confident his training will back him up along with God's grace. He arrives on the scene, discovering the two-story house buried deep in the flames. A frantic neighbor confirms the family is still inside. He jumps out and grabs his air-tank, equipping the mask

to his face. He grabs an axe and heads for the door. No other firefighter has yet to arrive.

The volunteer firefighter hears the screams of the small children inside. They pierce his ears and his heart. The axe is swung; the door collapses. A ball of fire explodes in front of him, knocking him down with brutal force. In pain, he crawls into the first floor of the house. Darkness overcomes him. A crash behind him sounds. He looks and sees the front of the house has collapsed. He knows time is running out. Every minute, every second counts. Still gripping his axe, he feels for the walls serving as a guide and listens for the screams.

He shouts, "Fire Department! Can anybody hear me? Fire Department! Is anyone in here?"

He repeats it over and over but never gets a reply. The volunteer firefighter finally discovers a door draped in baby pictures and crayon drawings. Risking danger, he bursts through the door and finds a small child. She is about three in age and is not breathing. He grabs her.

"Hey, can you hear me? I'm with the Fire Department," he says, but the little girl lies in his arms not moving, as if asleep. He continues on with the girl in his arms. He follows the walls and discovers a horrible fate. A man with a little boy by his side is lying on the floor. They have been engulfed by the flames. The darkness has gotten darker, the volunteer firefighter sweats harder, and time continues to run out. Suddenly, the volunteer firefighter hears a mumble. He thinks a person is

in the house, but it is his radio. After the other volunteer department was dispatched to their own structure fire, the Jamesville Fire Department, a paid department, has arrived, and their captain is on the radio, but the volunteer firefighter can't understand him; the flames are getting louder and louder. The captain orders him to leave the house because time is about to run out.

Walking through the rubble, the captain hears a noise. He yells, "Is someone there?"

"Yes, I'm buried under the rubble. I have one patient, a female minor, with me, barely hanging on. Need rescue immediately."

The little girl is the only member of her family to survive. She went on to fully recover. The volunteer firefighter did not share the same fate. On the way to the hospital, he suffered an attack of the heart. The EMTs frantically tried to pull life back into his body, but their attempts failed. At his home, the volunteer firefighter's wife awakens to see the scene of the fire on the news, and she starts to grab her keys to go find her husband, but a red Crown Victoria pulls up. Inside the car is the Jamesville captain. He tells the wife of the news, and she weeps.

The community came out in the hundreds to show their gratitude for the volunteer firefighter. Because of him, a life was saved. That's the goal of any firefighter—to save a life. God bless all of our firefighters, and God bless the volunteer firefighter.



Relaxed

Natalia Saucedo / Mexico City / Digital Photograph

Write Me a Letter

Jordan Barichello / Harmony

Write me a letter;
I don't care what it says.
So far overseas
I have to fight to remember
Why I'm over here;
Then I see the flag;
It's for my country.

Write me a letter;
I'm alone but I'm surrounded
By my brothers.
Tell me what's going on
And what you see happening.
Do you ever look at the American flag
And see what I'm fighting for?
It's for my country.

Write me a letter;
I don't care what it's about.
I'm with my brothers,
And I stand proud,
For I'm an American soldier.
I salute to the red, white, and blue
Because freedom comes at a price,
But I don't mind
With the sacrifices I make;
It's for our country.

The Mommy Roast

Janet York / Tyler

Your gentle maternal heart they would not hear
Nor see the vivid truth, simple and plain;
The game of blame was their only objective;
To them your independent actions were insane.

Words spoken in such harsh, hateful haste—
Anger and bitterness with no refrain;
Spiteful threats from hollow hearts,
Yet your abiding love for them did remain.

Life dealt complicated cards, you played your best;
Vulnerability—too difficult to explain.
They threw you away without a second thought;
Uncontrollable tears fell down like rain.

Hopefully, the healing time will swiftly fly,
A restored relationship forthcoming to maintain.
Unconditional love for your children
No matter what, your devotion never will wane.

Let go—of the drama, trauma of the agonizing past,
Its heavy burdens and deep penetrating pain.
The hurt will gently ease as darkness fades to light
By the serenity you soulfully strive to gain.



Watcher

Wayne Taliaferro / Kilgore / Digital SLR

Time in Fetters

Faith Blanchard / Grand Saline

I hear it on my wrist—
ticking underneath my pillow.
Soon it floats
around my room,
lingers on the painted walls,
then slips
beneath the window.

Ah! I try to watch it steal,
catch it slipping down the stair,
but these hands,
these hands of mine
cannot hold
or ever bind
time in fetters
or in irons,
cast it where
the sea devours
all my lonely,
wasted hours.



Bright Butterfly

Shannon Wilson / Tyler / Digital Image



Broken

Cassie Childs / Sophomore / Van / Digital Photograph

Cursed Cursor

Faith Blanchard / Grand Saline

When the cursor's a curse
And the worse comes to worst
And the most you can do
Is to ignore what is true.
All the papers are blank
To be only half frank,
And the cursor's a curse
You've not written a verse.

So, you stare at the page
Till your nails grow an age,
But you desperately think,
"Will that cursor still blink?"
And no words come to mind,
Not a sentence to find.
And the cursor's a curse
You've not written a verse.

Now you plead with your mind
That perhaps it'll be kind
And will give you a line
On Italian wine,
Or of shadows and hues,
From dark rubies to blues,
But the cursor's a curse
You've not written a verse.

This cursor may bind you,
Critique and remind you,
"You're still getting older;
Just ask your stiff shoulder."
You have to ignore it,
Make tea and just pour it.
For the cursor's a curse
That none can reverse.

Ocean

Sydney McFerron / Tyler

There is a different place where land ends,
Where water and sky meet on the same horizon,
Where mystery begins,
And where a day is never truly gone
But only dozes until the next adventure.

There is a different place where there are no shadows,
Where darkness cannot long endure,
Where liquid sapphires and emeralds ebb and flow,
And where billowing lace lines the shore.

There is a different place where the air sparkles with yellow light,
Where the only sounds are of lapping waves
And of gulls circling in flight,
Where words are not slaves.
Silence is appreciated in the cool stillness.

Does the blue ever end?
What lies beneath the mirrored deepness?
Where do sky and ocean blend?
The awe of complete peace
To experience pure content;
With feelings such as these,
It is a blessing to be silent.

Sacrificial Soul

Kallie Murphy / Chandler

Smoke fills the air,
Confusion coats the ground so bare,
A soldier waits to receive the news,
Of a sacrificial soul he once knew.
The battle scene is what we don't see.
The news stories we follow
Only halfway received.
Fighting and chaos,
Hatred and sin,
This is the world
We sacrifice in.
Souls are lost every day;
Too often gratitude goes unpaid.
Tear-filled eyes
Lay a casket to rest
Of an American hero
Who took his last breath,
Sacrificial soul!

Seashell

Erin Ethridge / Lindale / Charcoal Drawing





TJC Apache Ladies #1

Gloria Q. Page / Tyler / Digital Photograph

A Pearl Among Stones

Danielle Robinson / Lindale

I don't remember my mother. When I was three, she got really sick. Diagnosed with a rare form of bone cancer, the months preceding her death were long and tortuous. Well, at least that's what my granny told me anytime I complained about life. Sometimes I think the words flew out of her mouth before she could lock them up in her mind. I know she wasn't trying to be mean on purpose because afterwards she would always give me a cookie from the crock that sat on the worn Formica® countertop in the kitchen.

Granny came to live with us while my mom was sick, and I guess somehow she just never got around to leaving. My dad worked at the local sawmill, his worn Levis® always covered in a fine layer of sawdust, the lines in his face carved by too much worry and not enough joy. I guess after my mom died he sort of forgot that there was still a living, breathing world outside of the one that crumbled when she passed. He put a roof over our heads and made sure we had food enough to fill our bellies, but that was about the extent of his involvement in our lives.

It wasn't easy for me to make friends. Partly, I suppose, because I was a quiet person and partly because I didn't have pretty clothes or know how to say all the right things like the other girls at school.

Nature filled a large part of my life. Every spare moment was spent wandering through the woods that surrounded our house.

The first eleven years of my life were kind of like the smooth stones in a river bed, one pretty much like the next. The year I was twelve is like a pearl nestled in the middle of those stones, priceless and beautiful.

Early one morning, when the windowpanes were still painted with frost, I crept onto the front porch, the boards beneath my bare feet worn smooth by time. I whispered into the new day, breathing out the secret hopes and wishes I usually kept safely tucked away. I can still remember the ghostly fog of my breath hanging in the crisp air. It was in that moment that I heard it—a sound like nothing I had ever heard before. It was a haunting call that stirred up an answering cry inside of me. I was halfway across the dirt yard before I remembered that I was barefoot and wearing my raggedy pajamas. It ended as quickly as it began, and I wondered if I had imagined the whole thing.

Hours turned into days and days into weeks. The memory of the “angel music” began to fade. Early one spring evening, when I was absent-mindedly winding my way home through the fading light, I

noticed smoke wafting from the chimney of an old cabin that “outsiders” used in the summer. The cabin was surrounded by an unkempt, hedge-like thicket that towered above my head. Curious, I decided to take a closer look. As I pushed through the straggly branches, I saw a woman bent over, peering at something on the ground. Startled, my breath caught in my throat as I attempted to back up into the safety of the greenery. She turned, and I can still recall those enchanting grey eyes looking into mine for the first time. Putting a slender finger up to her lips, she motioned me forward. Curiosity overcame fear, and I slowly came to stand beside her. There, on the damp grass was a baby bunny, its body absolutely still except for a quivering pink nose. I shifted, and the movement brought the tiny creature to life. As it scampered away, she straightened, smoothed her simple white frock, and smiled.

To this day I cannot recall exactly how it happened, but before I knew it, I was perched on the edge of a tall, straight-backed chair, trying not to think about the hole in my faded overalls. Ms. Nora, for that was her name, made me feel like someone special. She poured tea from her china teapot and served me dainty apple tarts as if I were a princess instead of a backwoods girl who didn’t know anything about being proper. When I left that day, I was afraid it would be like the stories I had read about at school. As soon as I turned the corner, it would all vanish—never to be found again. I didn’t even tell Granny about it for fear that the magic would be ruined.

Two days later I found myself hurrying down the path towards the raggedy hedge and the magical place I hoped would still be there when all of a sudden, music surrounded me. It was the same haunting sound that I had heard months before. When I realized that it was coming from behind the hedge, I frantically pushed my way through. There, with tears sliding down her pale cheeks, was my fairy-tale lady. In her hands she held a strange instrument, her movements like some type of curious dance. I stood for what seemed like an eternity, my young heart aching with the beauty and the pain filling the air around us. Like someone coming out of a trance, she stopped with a startled gasp. A dainty handkerchief appeared from some hidden pocket, and she quickly wiped away the betraying evidence of her sorrow.

She invited me in for tea as if nothing unusual had happened. We talked about many things that day, but we didn’t talk about what had happened in the clearing, then or during the weeks that followed. I went to her house nearly every day once school finished. I think Granny started to get a little suspicious, but then she didn’t take much notice of what I did as long as I didn’t make more work for her. As time passed I found out that Ms. Nora knew a lot about things I had only heard of—things like magnificent parties where elaborate food was served on fine china, grandladies who wore fancy dresses, and houses that actually had water piped inside! Sometimes, though, we would sit on the porch, not talking, just listening to the soft creak of our rocking chairs. Occasionally,

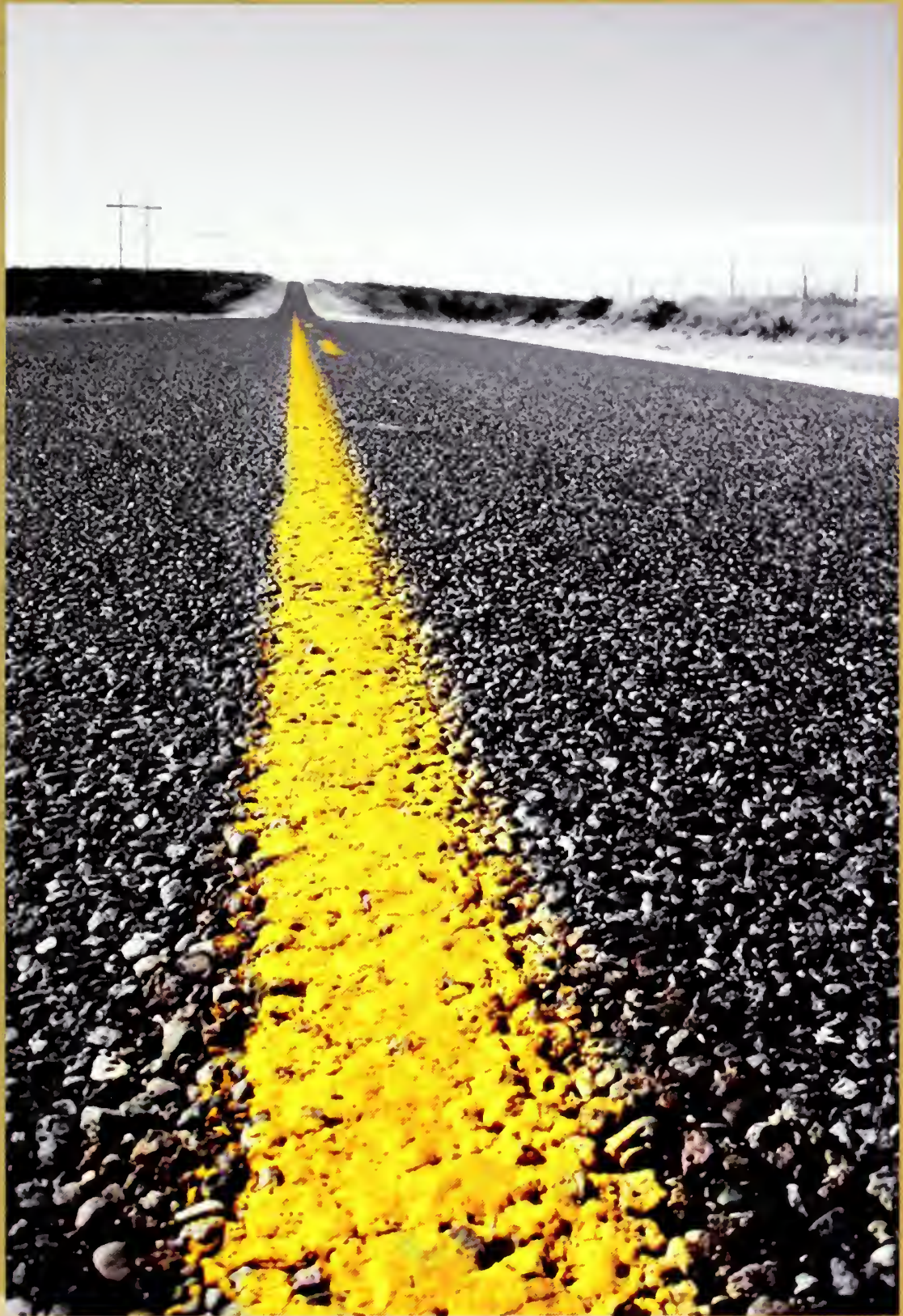
a curious passerby would stop by to take a peek at the “fine lady” who was living in the summer cabin, but for the most part, our times together were uninterrupted.

Time passed by all too quickly. The greens of summer turned into the vivid red, orange, and gold of fall. One stormy afternoon we sat listening to the rain pattering on the tin roof, a small fire warming our stocking-clad feet. Ms. Nora seemed a little distant, almost as if her mind was far away in a world all her own. In a single fluid movement, she rose to her feet, motioning me to stay put. Curious, I watched her go to a small cabinet and take out a long black case. She stood there with her back turned to me for a few moments. When she finally turned around, her grey eyes were soft with unshed tears. Slowly crossing the space between us, she knelt beside me and as tenderly as if it were a newborn child, placed the case on the floor. I think I was holding my breath as she unlocked the latch and lifted the cover.

There, nestled in the creamy silk, lay the strange instrument, the light from the fireplace dancing on the glossy brown finish. I wanted to reach out and touch it, but I was afraid that I would somehow taint its beauty. Later, I learned that it was called a violin, but in that moment, nothing mattered except what happened next. She placed the violin gently against her chin, positioned the bow on the strings, and proceeded to create magic. The sound filled the tiny cabin, echoing through my very soul. Excitement, wonder, and joy, along with a myriad of other emotions that I could not identify, flowed through me in

rhythm with the melody she composed. When the last strains of sound faded, I reluctantly opened my eyes. Ms. Nora stood there swaying slightly on her feet, spent from the passion with which she had played.

I never saw her again after that afternoon. The next time I went to the cabin, it was cold and empty except for one dainty lace curtain that lifted gently when I opened the door. Rumors swirled around like snowflakes in a January blizzard; she had been running from an abusive husband who finally found her and took her back home, or she was sick and went to live with a distant aunt. I even heard someone say that she had come to our little community to hide a pregnancy from her socially elite world, leaving again once it was “taken care of.” It wasn’t until years later that I realized she had been saying goodbye that afternoon. Sometimes I still wonder what had caused the depth of pain that lay under her serenity. I will always remember my time with her, my pearl among the stones.



A Way Out of West Texas

Virginia Nix / Tyler/ Digital Photograph

Lonely Night

Sherika Bailey / Tyler / Digital Photograph



Fifty Cents

Benjamin A. Hampton / Gladewater

A fifty-cent piece,
Merely that, fifty cents.
It's not made of gold or silver;
It hasn't been in my shirt pocket,
Stopping a bullet from killing me,
Nothing like that.
It's plain,
It's dull,
It's ordinary,
Yet, at the same time, it's not.
This particular piece of currency was a farewell,
A meaning of kindness and love,
A token for memory of a person long gone.
This fifty-cent piece was a gift,
A gift from my grandfather,
A venerable, grotesquely wise man,
For whom I cared dearly.
It was his parting gift to me:
The last gift I received from him,
The last gift before he passed away.
It's not much, true,
But it's the most important piece of currency I have.
It's his memorial—
His love,
His kindness,
His everlasting picture
Burned into my mind and soul.
For every time my fingers trace its form,
It's there.
My grandfather's fifty-cent piece:
Nothing more,
Nothing less,
Just that.



Night Drive

Bryana Alvidrez / Longview / Digital Photo and Photoshop

The Rose

Benjamin A. Hampton / Gladewater

I saw a Rose today; it glistened with bright dew.
With the wind it swayed; away, the small leaves blew.

Of such brilliant crimson, the flower had been,
Lying in its bed, giving off quite a sheen.

The Rose was quite immense, the size of my fist;
With long needles it hid, lain within some mist.

The magical display made my heart so warm;
The flower was brightly lit, glowing in its form.

I smiled to see that the leaves were falling;
The Rose lived with delight, with winter calling.

Snow began to descend, and the flower stayed;
The ice made a mountain, but the flower played.

The winter ended, and the thick ice melted;
The Rose, blue tinted, exhaustedly wilted.

The Rose turned black and fell to the soiled ground;
Touching down, the Rose cracked and spread all around.

With the spring anew, each piece then took to root;
Those small shards of Rose grew, blossoming new shoots.

The Rose stands firm to the great green grass hither
To weather the weather, growing forever.

Watermelon Seeds

Lori Harvell/Liberty, Missouri

Seven-eleven Crabapple Lane— numbers are important in a suburban subdivision. I'd been to this house once before a couple of years ago, but now I wasn't sure which one it was, and so, I was searching for the numbers. I drove past the community pool that now sat in the field that used to be so full of wildflowers that it had once brought tears to my eyes as a child. Then I drove past the second community pool that sat among row after row of indistinguishable three-story houses in a maze of treeless streets. Finally, I saw the numbers and recognized the three cars parked in front of the three-car garage. The last time I was here the garage was so full of boxes and clutter that only a narrow path wove through it all, leaving only a small space where my sister's convertible Volvo could fit. But you couldn't quite open the car doors all the way, so you really had to squeeze to get in and out. I pulled into the driveway and parked behind my brother-in-law's Suburban®.

After the long drive, it felt good to get out of the car and stretch my legs. Even though it was late evening, the heat from the summer sun still hung in the air. Without knocking, I walked in the front door—a rush of stale, cool air hit my face. As I entered the formal living room, I saw him sitting cross-legged on the Lazy-Boy®

sofa that my mother brought with her when she moved in after my father died. His overly round head sent tentacles of matted, curly, brown hair splaying into the air in a seemingly desperate attempt at escape and sat sturdily upon a shirtless torso of ample bosom and engorged stomach hanging over wrinkled khaki shorts—a behemoth Buddha, my thirteen-year-old nephew. My sister put down her magazine and pushed herself out of her chair towards me as my brother-in-law scurried out the door to retrieve my suitcase. Mother entered from the kitchen excitedly chattering about the dinner she was preparing. After a moment, I realized my eyes had wandered back to the sofa, and I was staring, eyes wide and mouth open. My nephew took no notice of my arrival as his dull, dazed eyes stared blankly from behind black horn-rimmed glasses that squished into his fleshy temples. Mother, seeing my disbelief as I watched his grubby hand pick at scabby, oozing sores atop each of his dirt-stained, mammoth feet, turned to him frantically.

“Stop picking at those sores, or they will *never* heal,” she admonished and then turned back to me. “He just won't leave them alone. He's constantly picking at them,” her voice now high and fast.

I couldn't seem to muster a response but stood dumbly staring. Nervously, she

began to prattle on, trying to excuse his obvious apathy, "Oh, he stays up all night playing video games and then sleeps *all* day. He's just now gotten out of bed, still half asleep," she exclaimed in mock disgust as she turned to give him a teasing smile. Realizing his mindless pursuit continued unrestrained, she once again scolded, "Stop! They're going to get infected!"

Under the recently picked scabs, I could see the open wounds were bright red with a yellow ring of puss surrounding them. She promptly exited to the kitchen, calling my nephew to follow.

"He loves to help me in the kitchen," she chirped, and I watched as his hulking frame lumbered willingly behind her. Curious, I followed.

The kitchen was large, opening to a spacious family room where a wall of six floor-to-ceiling windows faced east, exposing the coming darkness. Mindless noise from the big screen TV filled the air as flashing strobes of light danced eerily in the shadows. Despite the size of the rooms, they felt cramped. Everywhere I looked something filled the space. Next to the stove sat the remnants of breakfast; a platter of cold biscuits and sausage patties sat dangerously askew atop a bowl of congealed gravy. Bags of chips and boxes of crackers, an overflow from the pantry, littered the countertops of the kitchen along with a glut of plates and bowls carelessly piled amid a never-ending array of accessories. Cartons of Diet Coke®, Sprite® and Dr. Pepper® were stacked one on top of another on the floor at the end of the counter. As I

surveyed the confusion of the kitchen, amid this disordered jumble, I spotted a freshly baked angel food cake—no icing. As a child, for my birthday I always asked for an angel food cake—no icing—and a watermelon. Now, on my trips back to town, Mother always included those two things on the menu. My eyes searched for the melon that I knew must be there when I saw my nephew pull a plump, perfectly shaped, dark green watermelon from the ice chest. It had a deep golden spot on the bottom, indicating it had matured in the field, a good sign for ripeness. And now it was ice cold and sitting in his grimy hands. Still, the anticipation of that first sweet, juicy, cold bite made my mouth water. Carelessly shoving clutter aside with his forearm, he made room for the melon on the counter and took a large knife into his meaty hand. With the first insertion of the knife, the body of the melon cracked open eagerly. The pure, sweet fragrance penetrated the heavy air.

"You better wash your hands," I suggested to my nephew, remembering vividly his dirty fingernails pulling scabs away from oozing wounds.

He never turned his head or acknowledged me, so I impatiently implored once more, "You *really* need to wash your hands before you work with food." Still, he gave no response. "Please stop! Wash your hands!" I exclaimed, unable to hide my building anxiety.

Never looking up, he simply mumbled, "My hands aren't dirty."

I gasped; unsure of my next move, my mind began to race.

Do I wrestle the knife from his hand? I quickly gauged his height to be about six-two or three now and his weight to be around three-hundred pounds, so that option seemed out of the question. *Do I create a diversion, grab the melon, and run?* But I wasn't sure where I would go.

I decided my only recourse was to turn to Mother, who was standing at the stove when an explosion of violent popping and hissing erupted as she dropped frozen French fries into hot grease. Stuttering, I pleaded, "He...he...needs to wash his hands, don't you think?" I tried hard to conceal my developing panic.

Preoccupied with her risky endeavor, she glanced over her shoulder and absently suggested, "Wash your hands, please." We were all aware that he was her favorite, the youngest grandchild.

He turned towards her, knife still in hand. "I don't need to wash my hands, they're not dirty!" he growled through clenched teeth.

Mother looked at me, shrugged, gently raised her brow and turned back to the popping grease. I knew I could not wage a successful battle against this favored grandchild, and he knew it, too. Triumphant, his dangerous attention returned to the melon. I watched helplessly in horrified disbelief as he sliced, jabbed, and stabbed—ripping velvety red flesh away from its rind and cradling each shimmering piece of its heart in his filthy hand as he examined it, round and round, hunting and discarding the unwanted seeds as its liquid essence dripped between his fingers and ran down his arm. Finally, I

averted my eyes and retreated to the formal living room where my sister had resumed reading her magazine. She didn't look up until Mother called us to dinner.

We all took our seats around the dining room table, now overcrowded with dishes of food. Greedy hands began grabbing at the pan-fried hamburgers on white buns, greasy French fries atop oil-soaked napkins, and a limp salad of iceberg lettuce drowning in mayonnaise dressing. Placed close to me on the table was a perfect circle of glistening watermelon sitting in one of my grandmother's delicate, hand-painted, antique china bowls. Its clean, fresh fragrance struggled through the greasy air and again my mouth watered. Mother sat across the table smiling, self-satisfied as she watched me eye the glistening melon. Confusion slowly crept across her face as I pushed away from the table, stood, and walked away—my empty stomach grumbling.

Hero

Aaron Cheek / Flint / Adobe Illustration and PhotoShop

HERO

As I walk on the battlefield I'm in fear of my life, even though on my side are my gun and my knife. Through all of my camos I can still feel the sun, burning on my skin and heating my gun. I smell death and gunpowder all through the air, but for my country and my family, this pain I will bear. To be a true soldier, some will never know, or even appreciate the fact that I've become a real Hero. The rest of my story, I gave up my life for the Red, White, and Blue.

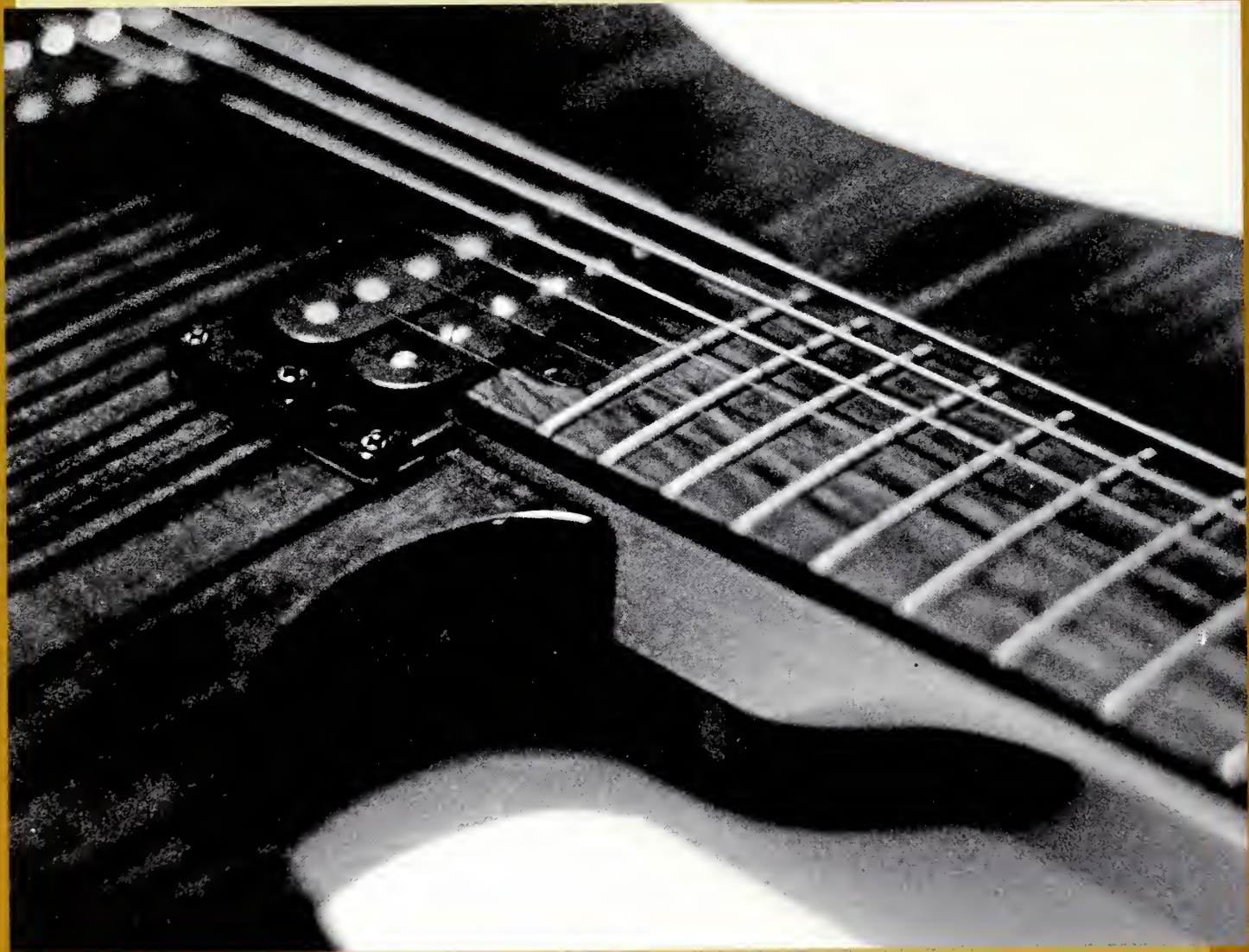
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As I walk on the battlefield I'm in fear of my life, even though on my side are my gun and my knife. Through all of my camos I can still feel the sun, burning on my skin and heating my gun. I smell death and gunpowder all through the air, but for my country and my family, this pain I will bear. To be a true soldier, some will never know, or even appreciate the fact that I've become a real Hero. The rest of my story, I gave up my life for the Red, White, and Blue.

Kill'n Time

Sondra Ramirez / Lindale / Silver Emulsion Print





Leave Me in My Transparency

Megan Bryant / Lindale / Digital Photograph

First Love

Rachel Neal / Oklahoma City

So young is the innocence
Which is stolen from today's youth;
The constant heartache
That feels like your heart is in a blender.

Doomed from the first kiss to the last,
Oh, the inevitable defeat from beginning to end—
That is your first love;
Your only warning sign is the butterflies.

The butterflies are a signal—
Get out while you can,
Proceed with caution,
Dead end.

Through the years the pain will never disappear,
Not a pain like that;
Forever lingering, a shadow,
Whether you be fourteen or forty.

The pain will never go away,
Not the burning in your soul that is fire,
Not the jagged, cold steel of the dagger
Piercing through your heart,
Serving as your constant reminder
Of every heavenly kiss
From their sweet and tender lips.

No, not a pain like that.
No, never the pain of a first love.



Lanterns

Natalia Saucedo / Tyler / Digital Photograph

12

3



Mississippi River Bridge

Jenean Gimler / Lafayette / Digitally Painted Photograph

Winter Park

Patrick Reynaud / Tyler

Somewhere way up in the snowy mountains
Lies a wonderful ski resort by the name of Winter Park;
It is thought to be one of the greatest
Ski resorts in North America.

The pearly white snow serves as
Cushions for the speeding skiers;
It is also a never-ending supply
Of ammunition for the children.

The clamorous clanking of the gears
On the lifts continues to beat in sync;
At the top of the mountain, skiers
Are falling on their faces, trying to get off.

On the slopes skiers weave in and out of
Tight situations like fish darting through the ocean;
Orange phosphorescent ropes mark off the
Sides of cliffs and peaks.

The smell of smoke and snow fills
The entire mountain air;
Near the restaurants the food smells
And tastes like a small slice of heaven.

Winter Park is truly a tiny piece
Of heaven draped over the mountains:
Its slopes will always leave
Memories in every skier.



Mexican Town

Natalia Saucedo / Mexico City / Digital Photograph

unforgettable Memory

Ashley Johnson/Longview

You crossed my mind today,
And a gold medal-like smile approached my cheeks,
Remembering the righteousness you instilled in me
And the memories, sweet as honeysuckle, we created together.

Your infinite patience every Saturday morning
When we would make my special weekend treat,
Allowing a tot my size to construct such a mess,
Making your summer-day good Mickey Mouse® chocolate chip waffles.

Those late afternoon strolls down the dirt roads
As the sun would fade behind the trees,
Instructing me to hold your hand, bear-tight,
Your love and devotion never ending.

All the grandest handmade crafts you fabricated;
Your compassionate, constructive criticism you portrayed
While teaching me the ins and outs of sewing,
Which you had such a love and passion for.

Your warm, welcoming ways of life
And the undivided attention that you blessed me with
From the very first day of my life
Has made me the delightful, prideful, hopeful person I am today.

Expression is unobtainable
Of how deeply these memoires with you weigh on me,
And it gives me the most joyful feeling inside
That someday I, too, will be an unforgettable memory.

The Parting

Joseph McCullough / Tyler

Till death do us part has arrived too fast,
But our claims will be put to the test at last.
I begin my slumber with a lonely heart's aching,
And I fear my body may be subject to waking.
For if in that slumber my death becomes disrupted,
I shall soon be condemned for a godless life corrupted.
The flames will engulf and the swords will impale
As I cry upon that former lie for help to no avail.
I'll see you, my sweet, looking peaceful as can be,
Draped in cloaks of linen and spotless ivory.
You'll look down upon me from the foot of Heaven's gate,
But be unable to lament at the anguish of my state.
For your place is in the Kingdom where sorrow has no stay,
But all the sorrow of the world is locked in my dismay.
I am damned forever since his Death I did deny;
This lake of fire is my home since his Truth I did defy.



Mask of Spades

Nick White / Van / Ink Drawing

The Last Straw and the Silver Pistol

Sydney M. Ferron/Tyler

The rusty red curtains parted, and the magician lifted his arms to receive his welcoming applause. His eyes were raised to the back of the shabby theater, looking above the audience as if they were unworthy of his notice. The theater was small, plain, and dilapidated. The audience sat in a cluster of chairs before the raised stage, which was rotting with termites. The magician was dressed as though for the Queen, sporting a black suit and a tall top hat that glimmered in the stage lights and seemed to give him an aristocratic feel which was also displayed by the mustache on his upper lip that curled up at the ends like a waxy, tormented caterpillar. The smile that showed his gleaming white teeth fell when he heard the pattering applause of the audience, like scattered droplets of rain.

He bowed to his few audience members and tried to regain his confident smile. The magician's apprentice, a young man around the age of fifteen, peeped through the wings and saw the magician's brow cloud in frustrated anger as he continued through the motions of the show. Dread gripped the boy's stomach, and he hoped that tonight he would be fast enough to dodge the magician's cane.

"Ladies and gentlemen," the magician saluted regally, "I am the magician Alonzo

Kalevala!" He stopped, anticipating applause, but there was only a slight cough coming from the fifth row of the theater. His smile faltered, but he continued with his speech, "I have come to show you the mysteries of the world, the darkest secrets of the Earth's core, and the strangest phenomena that the world has ever witnessed. I cannot explain why these amazing things happen or how they are done. What you will see tonight are mysteries that cannot be defined or duplicated; mysteries that our dear world has forgotten. So I ask that you prepare yourselves for a memorable performance."

Here, the magician snapped his wrist in the air and produced a black whip laced with licking flames. He brandished the fiery whip like a lasso, twirling it around his head and bringing it down with a loud crack. Each time the whip cracked, sparks shot from the tip like Chinese fireworks that sparkled in the wide eyes of the audience. He snapped the whip in the air and sparks showered onto the audience, dying before they landed. The audience members flinched as the fiery rain fell upon them. Two thin men galloped out of the theater in retreat with their bowler hats clamped down on their heads, frightened out of their wits and howling like banshees. Alonzo snapped the whip at their backs as

a vengeful punishment, showering them with sparks as they made their cowardly exit. The remaining observers stayed in their seats, stunned into awe and wondering what strange visions the magician had to offer.

However, fear outweighed curiosity, and by the end of the performance very few of the audience members remained. Alonzo relished their fear, but because of his twisted satisfaction, no sane person would come to his performance twice.

If the times were not so hard, all of his employees would have left him, too. Alonzo usually did not do his dark magic off the stage. He had no need; his employees were already terrified of him. Everyone who worked for him had suffered the effects of his violent temper. His voluptuous assistant often had to cover bruises on her fair arms with cakey stage makeup. The backstage workers were known to sport a black eye from Alonzo's menacing cane, but the crew member who had received the most abuse was the magician's apprentice, Palmer.

He lived with Alonzo in a grey-walled London apartment and was no stranger to his unpredictable fits of rage. Despite the horrors of rooming with the magician, it was still better than living in the work house or on the streets where unspeakable and nasty business would happen in the dark, worse than any nightmare. Palmer had known the streets and wished never to go back. So long as he kept out of Alonzo's way, he met with no real harm.

When the audience had scurried off into the night, Palmer finished packing

the magician's belongings and trudged out into the empty streets, exhausted from the night's show. Finally, he stumbled back to the dreary apartment, his eyelids heavy and drooping from fatigue. The apartment was far from grand. Paint peeled from the walls, and the furniture was mismatched with discarded pieces from various theaters in London. Two green-striped couches lay back-to-back, one facing the crackling fire and the other facing the paint-chipped brown door. Various styles of chairs clustered around them to form a hodge-podge seating area.

Palmer curled up on the far couch, allowing the cackling fire to chase away the night's chill from his exhausted limbs. He sleepily ruffled his chestnut hair. Whirls of dust from the theater's ancient curtains sprinkled the air like fairy dust, sending him off into a deep sleep. Quickly, he was lost in the calm and pleasant sleep of pure exhaustion. A raging tempest would not have awakened him, and in the midst of the magician's thunderous footsteps, he remained asleep.

"Only fifteen people in the house tonight! Collin, this is an outrage, an insult!" Leaving the door open for his manager, Collin, to close behind him, the magician stormed through the apartment, the tails of his coat whipping violently. Outside of the theater, the magician shed his stage name and became Richard Crawlinski, but the essence of Kalevala clung to his every movement—the proud strut of a showman, the dramatic flourish, and the enunciated speech was more pronounced, as if the magician had never



left the stage.

"Richard, what's the use of yelling at me? I had no control over it," said Collin, taking off his coat in a frustrated manner and throwing it unceremoniously over the back of a chair. Collin removed his round glasses and pinched the bridge of his nose as if to massage away the tension. His every movement suggested that he knew he had already lost this battle. His mousy brown hair was streaked with grey at the temples, and his brown eyes showed the weariness of a man who felt as if he had lived a hundred years on the soiled Earth. Collin walked with his shoulders slightly hunched, staring at the ground as though trying to avoid someone who might recognize him. He peered up at Crawlinski from beneath a furrowed brow that wrinkled his forehead like the skin of an elephant.

"Collin, you're my manager. You should have put out more fliers or something. You should have done more to notify the public of my fantastic performances. Enraged, the magician ripped his French-styled, fake mustache from his upper lip and tossed his black cane aside.

"Advertisement costs money, which we don't have," the manager sighed as he plopped down on the couch, back-to-back with Palmer's sleeping but obscured figure. "What with the bloody Industrial Revolution people are raving about these days, no one believes in magic anymore. Everything is run by electricity. Scientific discoveries are made daily. There is just no mystery in the world anymore. Science

explains everything. To the public, there is no longer such thing as the supernatural. It's hard enough to get the people in the theater, and then you scare them off."

The magician began pacing around the parlor agitatedly.

"People are weak-minded. They have no idea of what glorious wonders I am capable of. In my show, there are no trick cabinets, locks, or mirrors. Everything I do on the stage is real. My talents are priceless. Do you have any idea what it takes to acquire my skills? Do you think my performances are mere parlor tricks?" He stalked over to the couch and bent over his manager with an air of superiority. Richard's dark, oiled hair fell forward over his blue eyes, giving him a rabid and maddened look.

"From knowing you all these years, I have a notion of what your talents cost, and I desperately wish that I had remained entirely ignorant." The manager spoke barely above a whisper as he looked up into those icy blue eyes that scorched all that they looked upon with sinister disdain. Collin's chest heaved as though to strengthen himself against something unpleasant. "I'm shutting you down, Richard. There's no money."

"What? Are you barking mad? No!" shouted the magician, rearing his head back like a viper and pacing around the room once more.

"Richard, you cannot deny that we are tampering with forces that are very dangerous. It was fine when the money was rolling in, but now I think we should abandon this venue before... there is some

accident, which there is bound to be." Collin was thinking of an incident the previous week when a volunteer from the audience became trapped in a mirror for thirty seconds. The world inside the mirror was entirely underwater with no oxygen for the poor man to breathe. The unsuspecting volunteer had passed through the mirror by touching his fingertips to his reflection. He then seemed to be sucked into the glass quite inexplicably. Suddenly, the mirror no longer reflected the faces of the stunned audience but instead showed the volunteer floating in crystal-clear water. He had his nose pinched between his fingers, trying to stop the stream of precious air bubbles from escaping.

Alonzo finally managed to set his victim free by breaking the mirror with an axe hidden offstage. The stunned volunteer spilled from the mirror along with a tidal wave of water which smelled like sulfur. The poor man sputtered and shivered beneath his wet clothes. Had he been trapped in the mirror for much longer, he would have drowned before a live audience. Every citizen in London would have spoken of nothing but the unfortunate volunteer who had taken his last breath on Alonzo's stage. Such publicity Collin wished to avoid.

"An accident? Do you think I am not powerful enough to control myself?" demanded the magician, menacingly gripping the wooden back of a chair.

"No, I don't. Power you have, I admit, but not over yourself. If there is an accident, you'd risk a hanging for murder."

"Murder is nothing," said the magician

with a disturbing unconcern. "I have done worse, and you have known of it."

"And my knowledge puts my neck on the line, too," Collin answered sternly. "By keeping the show running, I am putting my life into your hands at every performance. I cannot risk an accident, and your power is too great and too unstable. Without the money, it is not worth the risk."

"The show will continue," Richard's voice rang with stubborn finality.

"Don't make this any more difficult than it already is," Collin murmured, slowly pulling a silver pistol from his jacket pocket. Placing it very diplomatically on a small table near his left elbow, the pistol thumped against the hard wood. Silence descended eerily and suddenly like a thick fog on the London streets. He had the magician's attention. "You will not take me down with you. Quit while you are ahead, Richard! There is more at stake here than just your pride."

The magician sat down in a chair across from his manager, resting his elbows on his knees and folding his hands tightly in front of him. He stared unblinkingly at Collin. The manager dropped his eyes, disturbed by the magician's piercing stare—as though he could see the very secrets of his soul. For several moments there was silence. Richard continued to stare intently at his companion, never blinking and hardly breathing, just concentrating. The manager's left hand began to twitch. He looked down at his spastic fingers confusedly. Strange shivers shook his arm like a nervous earthquake.

"Richard, stop!" he yelled.

The magician continued to stare into Collin's eyes, boring into his mind. The manager's hand seemed to have a life of its own. It twitched and jolted to the arm of the couch then leapt onto the small table where the silver pistol lay. The manager's eyes glazed like a helpless bird's overcome by the glassy eye of the snake as the magician gained full control. With fumbling fingers, Collin grabbed the pistol and steadily raised it to his own head, his finger pressing lightly on the trigger.

"Never," the magician whispered, breaking the horrible silence. "I'll never stop."

The shot sounded.

Palmer leapt into the air like a scared cat. He saw the manager slumped on the couch behind him, the blood streaked in a curve from the back of the couch to where the manager's head rested on the green upholstered arm. In death, his face was tortured and haunting. Palmer looked in horror at the magician and a tangled knot in his stomach twitched sickeningly. He felt as though he might soil himself.

"Tell no one," the magician said in a deep and even tone, standing calmly near the door as if to bar the exit like a black cat across Palmer's path.

Palmer felt trapped. He ran upstairs to his tiny room, wanting nothing more than to be gone from the magician's devilish presence. On the foot of the stairs, he felt glass crunch beneath his boot, but he dared not turn back or slow down. The manager's spectacles lay in bloodied, scattered fragments at the bottom step.

Palmer slammed the door to his tiny room and leaned against it defensively as if fearful the magician might try to force his way into the humble closet. There was just enough room for a tiny cot and a brown leather suitcase. Palmer pushed the cot in front of the door in the naive hope that it would bar the magician from entering. Palmer strained his ears but did not hear a sound other than his own rasping breath. When he was sure that the magician would not storm up after him, he began to pace agitatedly around the small room. He took three steps to one wall, then turned around and took three steps to the other, like a caged animal in the zoo. Sweat broke out on his forehead as Palmer tried to comprehend what he had just witnessed. Murder.

Gradually, Palmer became aware of an odd, uncomfortable itching feeling radiating from his stomach in the center just beneath his ribcage. He scratched the spot absentmindedly. It itched like a bed-bug bite, but Palmer was too concerned for his life to pay it much attention. The pain did not begin until he took away his fingers and discovered blood. Palmer lifted his shirt to find an odd worm-shaped string of flesh had appeared on his abdomen. The skin around it was blotchy and irritated. He ran his hand over the strange ridge-like bump. The little band of upraised flesh was hard like bone.

Moaning cries escaped him as the foreign object burned from inside his body like a heated iron. He clawed at his stomach, trying to get it out. Cold sweat streamed from his entire body. The mysterious

object burned with a fire so hellishly hot that it seemed to turn cold, like a piercing arrow tipped with dry ice. Palmer fell onto the floor, trying desperately to remove the cause of this suffering lying beneath his skin.

After several long minutes of kneading the tight skin of his stomach, the foreign object punctured the skin and surfaced. Palmer braced himself as he pulled at the dark tip, which looked like a small black talon or the fang of a spider trying to rip its way out of his stomach. Palmer pulled slowly, feeling all the while as if he would be sick. Though the alien object was small, it was slow work extracting it from his body. Every few centimeters, he had to stop and regain his breath so that he would not faint. It felt as if this black, bone-like barb was dragging his innards out with it.

After what seemed like hours, the young apprentice finally removed it completely. He blinked the cold sweat from his eyes and looked at the item between his bloody fingers. It appeared to be almost three-inches long and like something belonging on the back of a porcupine. The jet-black barb gleamed menacingly, a hellish phenomenon.

Palmer was breathing hard, sitting in a pool of his own sweat on the hard floor, and glad that the fire had finally left him. He had no doubt as to how the barb had gotten inside him. The magician's threat was frighteningly clear. Tell no one.

Flowers for Betty

Sherika Bailey / Tyler Digital Photograph



Beauty of a Woman

Katrena Larkin / Jasper

Beauty of a woman cannot be measured by the way her hair bends in the wind —
or by the way her lips curl and hips swing.
Inner beauty surpasses all superficial pretenses.
Beauty of a woman is self-respect.

Grace defines her--intelligence resides within. She knows when to speak and when to keep quiet.
Confidence never seems to escape this woman.
She walks with her head held high;
but not so high that she can't humble herself to speak a kind word to others.
Beauty of a woman is self-esteem.

Past failures, present struggles, or future endeavors, she uses her stumbling blocks as stepping stones.
Determined, strong, and courageous, she continues with her life's journey.
Beauty of a woman is self-discipline.

Over time, her hair will turn gray and outward appearance will begin to fade.
Nevertheless, inner beauty, she will sustain.
Who is this beautiful woman of whom I speak?
I am this beautiful woman.
I am she.

So to my mothers, sisters, girlfriends, and even daughters, are you this beautiful woman within?
Beauty of a woman is...simply beautiful.

The Beaten Path

Brandi Shiflett/Tyler

How do I tell you what's inside--
Of all the times I had to cry?
You love the me you see outside,
Never glimpsing thoughts I held inside.

I see the world with weary eyes,
The thought of fate is my demise.
I hate to see the pain and hurt,
Of life that has been turned to dirt.

I see the tears and sorrow clear,
In eyes of all you once held dear;
For those who took the beaten path,
Could not escape life's heated wrath.

They chose a life of no respect--
The kind that you will soon regret;
The choice you made to go astray,
Will keep you off the narrow way.

Chances to change are just a few,
And then you might just start anew;
The chance to change has passed you by,
The facts are here, they do not lie.

You chose your path and it's too late;
Your choices led you to this fate.
By now you've missed the loving bliss
Of all the ones you soon will miss.



Junk Food Nation

Bryana Alvidrez / Longview / Collage



Boomtown

Wayne Taliaferro / Kilgore / Digital SLR



THE
BELLTOWER